



Bernard Henrie is a Los Angeles area currency trader, a profession he says that allows him to work at home with the maximum amount of time for poetry. He travels whenever he can and on a 1996 trip to Viet Nam he adopted a little girl and has now sent her through school there. His first book of poems, **Post Cards from the Java Sea**, appears later this year.

Please describe your favorite poem or kind of poetry.

Give me a few images and I won't need much else in my survival pack. And yes, T. S. Eliot. Yes, Elizabeth Bishop; and Sharon Olds who I recently had the pleasure to meet; I wished I had met Wallace Stevens on the cruise where his wife became pregnant and he began the Sea Surface Full of Clouds group of verses.

Seamus Heaney and Dylan Thomas; the two English national treasures: Philip Larkin and John Betjeman. I met Anne Sexton two years before her suicide, I never forgot her clarity and generosity to young poets; Andreinne Rich, Marianne Moore's influence on Ms. Bishop; Dame Edith Sitwell speaking her poems through a megaphone which she extended through the curtain so that her audience would not be distracted by her presence — oh, I wish I had seen that performance!

Joe Bolton, 28 and just finishing his MFA program — only to kill himself. An excerpt:

**In the twilight
Of white cities,**

**In our houses,
In our closets—
Clothes we put on
In the hope of
Taking them off.**

All of those folks, gone.

If you could spend a day with a living poet you admire, what would you do together? What might a passerby overhear?

One person still with us, Dana Gioia (pronounced Joy-A) wrote the essay in the Atlantic Monthly entitled "Can Poetry Matter? he's the head of the *NEA*. A quote:

Poetry has vanished as a cultural force in America. If poets venture outside their confined world, they can work to make it essential once more.

I'd like to sit by the boats in the San Diego Harbor on an azure perfect day and argue, argue over his views:

When poets stopped telling stories, they not only lost a substantial portion of their audience; they also considerably narrowed the imaginative possibilities of their art

he thinks poetry is done in by "compression, intensity, complexity, and ellipsis..."

The passerby would hear us both tossing out lines from our favorite poems, me the more lyrical — Gioia the more narrative and traditional: Homer, Virgil and Ovid — Whittier and Longfellow. I would like to tell him about Dover Beach — a "modern" poem because it demonstrates the spirit, the heart departing the intellect — the ocean leaving the beach; we would argue about Ortega y Gasse's remark that modern art is that work which most removes any reference to the human form.

I imagine a long and happy afternoon.

Which relationship is more important: a) poetry and politics or b) poetry and philosophy? Why?

Poetry and politics, for me.

Another long and happy afternoon is the time I've spent with politics — real world politics; raising money, getting out the vote, and issues. My mentor in social services and politics was my boss for ten years; he was the first Hispanic elected to our local school board and he has now been just elected to his fourth term as mayor; he wore white socks, a funny tie much too short for his stout frame, and liked a good stiff drink now and then; I never saw him sit at a desk for more than an hour and he practiced management by walking around — he talked to everyone, janitors to company presidents.

A little later, when my own daughter was still quite small, she reluctantly agreed to join the campaign of a good person who was running for his first congressional office; he won and we have remained friends and more for his 14 year career in Washington — my daughter now talks happily about that first campaign and would later go to jail as a high school senior in an act of civil disobedience.

If you were able to place poetry in the world where it does not seem prominent, how would it behave there?

Politics often produces great oration and that often is tinged with poetry; Minister Louis Farakhan used to close his meetings with an Arab call to prayer, bone chillingly and beautiful even if you didn't agree with anything he had to say; modern voice over in TV dramas like *Six Feet Under*, use poetry blended with music and imaginative flights of fantasy to give a cadence to such dramas that speech alone does not provide.

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Clarinet Redux

Rump of wind almost played out.
The curtains in and later out.

Half-drunk bees lean into phlox
and ivy beds. Birds somewhere,
but not far off.

A clarinet dropped carelessly
by the white trellis. Hair brush
and apple, a still life on the desk.

Room light becomes anemic,
ceases to move.

Scattered music sheets, metronome.
Uncapped fountain pen, letter knife,
monotonous ticking clock.

The afternoon slowly running out.

Perched in the corner of the room,
knees up and braced against the wall,
reading a letter for the third time.

You think:
she could spring at any time
and tear the beating heart from
the small cave of your chest

nude work

I have always married
women

who draw pictures of me
naked.

I undress without turning my
back or leaving the room, I look
like a silver banana.

Himalayan snow leopard,
to myself
(spots from the aging liver)
flaccid penis like a professor
unable to find his lecture notes

Where will we see you and your work in five years?

In five years, I hope my own poems will not only be clearly recognizable as books of poetry, but also as a means to reveal character and mood in mixed media performances including films and even TV drama.

Tell us a story: what drew you to poetry in the first place? Why did you start writing?

I began writing as a journalist; I was once assigned to a New York Times reporter to help background a major story and he noticed what he called “feature writing.” I began doing human interest feature stories — Peace Pilgrim, Louis Armstrong, Random House publisher Bennet Cerf and any a fellow university student who murdered his entire family in a night of madness. Any one I found fascinating — I was hooked on writing by that time.

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Baedeker

Night sail to Venice, Baedeker memorized,
my wife packed like lunch. A sucking moon
opulent as a woman's breast.

Unfinished manuscript tied up in a box,
blotched life. The drizzle of bad luck.
My face grown stern as a warden.

I read to the pigeons of St. Mark's
who cock their heads, flap oily wings
and stare with one feral eye.

The Frescoes of Villa Narcisse,
orphaned scents in galleries,
architectural spars, ices at a shop.

Ancient women in parks, their hands
coiled like rope, girls slender as Latin
prayer books.

I sleep naked on a rosette veranda.
A passport photo that no longer
looks like the vessel of my heart.

Pink fingers pull my wife's hair,
she squeaks in pleasure, her pod feet
reddened below her white negligee.

I open my briefcase. Buckle down.
The long stream of words and pages
open like a mouth with teeth gone bad.

A dawn gaze into the rusty Adriatic,
the first carts of trash like wounded
at the Battle of the Otranto Straits.

In the blue miasma of the town
smoke rises from a Lagoon vaporetto.
Drains hang like executed thieves.

I will take poison, marry for money,
polished shoes overturned by the bed.
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Venice, In flagrante delicto, splash
your acetelene sigh in my ear as though
no other lover on earth existed.

Venice, I grow a flower in my mind
for you; take your Lazarus boy
home over velveteen stones.